

Perishable Foods and Power Outage

Knowing ways for keeping food safe when the power goes out will help reduce the worry about what is safe to eat and minimize the potential loss of food. The following information will help you make the right decisions for keeping food safe:

- **Always keep your refrigerator at or below 40° F (4° C). Keep your freezer at or below 0° F (-18°C).** Use an appropriate thermometer to determine if your refrigerator and freezer are at the proper temperatures.
- **If the power goes out, keep the refrigerator and freezer doors closed as much as possible to maintain the cold temperatures.** An unopened refrigerator will keep food safely cold for about four hours. A full freezer will stay sufficiently cold for about 48 hours (24 hours if it is half full) if it is unopened.
- **If your freezer is not full, keep items close together**—this helps the food stay cold longer.
- **Keep frozen meat and poultry items on the lowest (coldest) shelf of the freezer, and separated from other food** so that thawing meat or poultry juices will not contaminate the other food.
- **Obtain dry or block ice to keep your refrigerator as cold as possible** if the power is going to be out for a prolonged period of time.
- **If you are not sure a particular food is cold enough, take its temperature with the food thermometer.** Discard any perishable foods (such as meat, poultry, fish, eggs, and leftovers) that have been above 40° F (4° C) for two hours or more, and any food that has an unusual odor, color, or texture, or feels warm to the touch.
- **Be sure to discard any fully cooked items in either the freezer or the refrigerator that have come in contact with raw meat juices.**
- **Remember, you cannot rely solely on appearance or odor.** Never taste food to determine its safety. Some foods may look and smell fine, but if they have been at room temperature too long, bacteria that cause food-borne illness can begin to grow very rapidly. Some types of bacteria produce toxins that are not destroyed by cooking.

If previously frozen food is partially or completely thawed when the power comes back on:

- **You can safely refreeze it if it contains ice crystals or is at 40° F (4° C) or below.** You will have to evaluate each item separately.
- **Partially thawed food can be refrozen safely, but refreezing may reduce the**

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quality of some food.

- Raw meats and poultry from the freezer can be refrozen without too much quality loss.
- Prepared food, vegetables, and fruits can be refrozen, but there may be some quality loss.
- Fruit juices can be refrozen safely without much quality loss, but frozen fruit will become mushy.

Food from the refrigerator and freezer are not safe outdoors, even in cold weather or snow because:

- **Frozen food can thaw if it is exposed to the sun's rays.**
- **Refrigerated food may become too warm and food-borne bacteria could grow.**
- **The outdoor temperature could vary hour by hour,** and the temperature outdoors would not be satisfactory to protect both refrigerated and frozen foods at the same time. For example, if the outdoor temperature is 25° F (-4° C), it is too cold for refrigerated food and too warm for frozen food.

Instead of putting food outdoors, consider taking advantage of the cold by making ice. Fill buckets, empty milk cartons, or cans with water and leave them outside to freeze. Then put the homemade ice in your refrigerator and freezer or coolers.